

Employer Phone Forum

City and County Governments August 3, 2005

Available exclusively to Best Workplaces for CommutersSM, Phone Forums provide cutting-edge information on a range of topics related to commuter benefits. Moderated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), these forums feature experts on key topic areas.

On August 3, 2005, Best Workplaces for Commuters hosted a Phone Forum to discuss ways in which local, city, and county governments are uniquely positioned to deal with commuting issues. The featured speakers discussed the approaches their jurisdictions have put in place to manage transportation demand on the local level. Steve Offutt, program manager for Best Workplaces for Commuters, provided opening remarks and directed the participants to the featured speaker's PowerPoint presentations.

Featured Speakers

Leslie Montisano, City of Henderson, Nevada

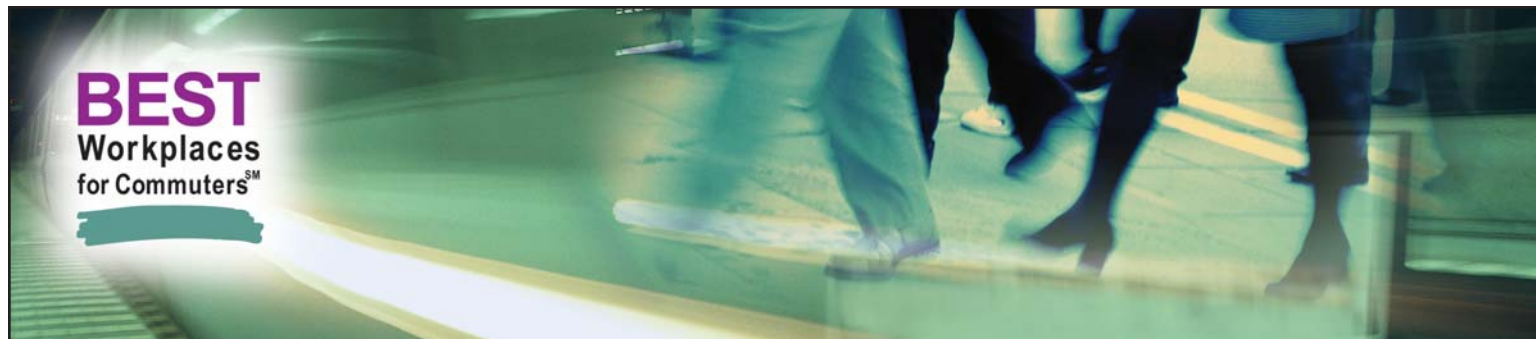
Ms. Montisano began her presentation by describing the City of Henderson. From 1990 to 1998, Henderson was recognized as the fastest growing city in the country and is currently the second largest city in Nevada with a population of more than 240,000. The city initiated its commuter benefits program in 2001 and is currently a member of Club Ride Commuter Services, a program sponsored by the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC). Many of the commuter benefits offered to employees through Club Ride are offered at no cost to the city. These include ridematching, monthly prize drawings, reserved parking, emergency ride home (ERH), and a monthly commuter

newsletter. In 2002, the city began offering additional benefits including fully subsidized bus passes and an annual bike-to-work event and giveaway, and is currently setting up a vanpool.

Ms. Montisano explained that after developing a comprehensive commuter benefit program for city employees, the city expanded its efforts and now encourages other local employers to join Club Ride and develop commuter benefit programs. The city also forged partnerships with other organizations including RTC and the Transportation Coordinator Network of Southern Nevada. The City of Henderson's transportation demand management group is now planning to work with the region's economic development council to include information about Club Ride in its marketing materials.

Chris Hamilton, Arlington County, Virginia

Mr. Hamilton described the transportation environment in Arlington County and the county's extensive commuter benefit program along with his team's efforts to promote public transportation, biking, and walking and the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation to its customers. In addition, Mr. Hamilton described the county's new car-sharing initiative. In March 2004, Arlington County launched a pilot program in collaboration with Zip Car and Flexcar and was able to more than double the company's memberships, numbers of shared cars, and utilization rates in less than one year. For more detailed information on the county's commuter programs, review Mr. Hamilton's presentation at < http://www.bwc.gov/pdf/ph_forums/Arlington%20Presentation%2008-03-05.pdf >.



Leslie Rhodes, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Ms. Rhodes explained that in 2001, a stakeholder group concerned with air quality issues in Mecklenburg County proposed joining and promoting Best Workplaces for Commuters throughout the community. However, Ms. Rhodes encountered a number of obstacles common to local governments. First, the county had to develop an implementation plan to outline the primary and supporting benefits to be offered to its 4,500 employees and identify a budget to pay for transit subsidies. Next, the county implemented an ERH service, which it provides through the use of county-owned cars. Managers allow employees to use a county car in an emergency if one is available. If not, employees are allowed to use a taxi service, which is paid for under the department's travel budget. Ms. Rhodes noted that since 2003, no employee has used the taxi service. She explained that while the ERH benefit is not expensive or highly utilized, it is important in assuring employees using public transit, carpools, and vanpools that they can get home quickly in an emergency.

Open Discussion

Mr. Offutt asked Ms. Montisano how she was able to get City Council's support for prioritizing TDM issues in such a fast-growing city with many other prevalent issues. Ms. Montisano explained that she wasn't involved at the beginning of the process. However, she mentioned that the city's Human Resources Department originally put forth the idea of new employee benefits. Mr. Hamilton added that county management in Arlington has supported smart growth for the past 20 to 30 years and been advocates for promoting public transit, biking, and walking.

Britt Taylor-Burton from AMD explained that like

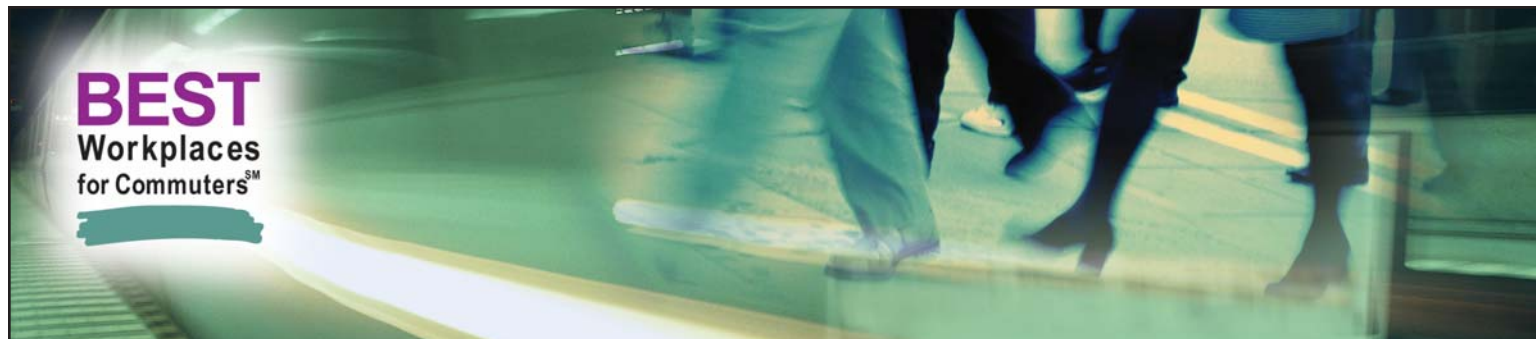
Mecklenburg County, his company implemented an ERH program. The ERH service is promoted and easy to access, but it has never been utilized. He emphasized that employers considering such a program should not be concerned about overuse. Ms. Rhodes added that she met a lot of resistance in Mecklenburg County when trying to develop the ERH program, and all cost estimates were far above actual expenditures to date. Another participant added that her organization has provided only four ERH vouchers in the history of the program. Mr. Offutt noted that the www.bwc.gov Web site offers ERH toolkits for individual employers and planning organizations to assist in setting up ERH programs.

Ms. Rhodes responded to Mr. Offutt's earlier question and explained that Mecklenburg County presented its implementation plan to city council members as a partial solution to local air quality issues. Once the city council approved the program, the county redirected its message and promoted the transit subsidies as a new employee benefit for county staff members.

Kevin Tingley from Best Workplaces for Commuters asked Mr. Hamilton how Arlington County worked with two competing car sharing companies—Zip Car and Flexcar—and if this caused any problems. Mr. Hamilton explained that each company has distinct parking spaces and cars, and that Arlington County worked equally with both companies. He added that the companies competed to add more parking spaces, more cars, and more participants, which was especially good for their members.

Anne Bradley from Best Workplaces for Commuters asked Mr. Hamilton if car-share users receive a discount for using the service regularly and if Arlington County has found its investment to be cost-effective.





Mr. Hamilton replied that users do not receive a discount since the cost of using shared cars is already less than the cost of owning a vehicle. Mr. Hamilton added that Arlington County has found collaboration with the two companies to be very cost effective. The County just gave up 40 parking spaces and provided some initial subsidies in exchange for the private sector managing, promoting, and providing the service.

Karen Kress from the Tampa Downtown Partnership explained that she is trying to work with the City of Tampa, Florida to become a Best Workplaces for Commuters. She asked the panelists if it is more effective to collaborate with a few individuals or to form a task force when working with municipalities. Ms. Rhodes reiterated that Mecklenburg County's program began with a stakeholder group concerned with local air quality. Ms. Rhodes continued, explaining that once the county bought into the concept she was able to work with two other representatives to draft the implementation plan. Ms. Rhodes offered to make the implementation plan available to the participants and it is now posted at <www.bwc.gov/pdf/ph_forums/mecklenburg-plan.pdf>. Ms. Montisano noted that the City of Henderson already offered commuter benefits when it learned about Best Workplaces for Commuters. Ms. Montisano now uses the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation as a tool to help encourage other local employers to offer employer-provided commuter benefits.

Mr. Offutt asked Ms. Montisano how she envisions the city interacting with its citizens in terms of commuting and commuter benefits in the future. Ms. Montisano responded that she would like to see more of a partnership between the city and its employers. She added that the city has a strong working relationship with the RTC, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Regional Economic Development Department.

Mr. Offutt asked Mr. Hamilton about Arlington County's relationship with local business organizations. Mr. Hamilton explained that the county is a member of the Chamber of Commerce and other local business groups and participates regularly in meetings.

Ms. Montisano mentioned that the City of Henderson has two transportation coordinators who are part of the Human Resources Department and, as such, have many other duties in addition to serving as transportation coordinators. She asked the participants if they work in a similar situation. Mr. Hamilton noted that Arlington County has approximately 30 employees that work in the commuter services group, 10 of whom work in sales to local businesses. A representative from Harris County, Texas, noted that most employers in his region have one or two transportation coordinators but the county mainly relies on the North Texas Council of Governments and two local TMAs to help distribute information and provide services.

Closing

Mr. Offutt provided closing remarks and reminded the participants of the October 19, 2005 list release date of this year's Best Workplaces for Commuters from FORTUNE 500 companies. He also announced a colleges and universities orientation call on August 24, 2005 for the industry's transportation coordinators to learn more about Best Workplaces for Commuters. He asked all participants to send any questions to bwc@epa.gov. Ms. Bullard from Best Workplaces for Commuters reminded the participants of the upcoming Association for Commuter Transportation International Conference on September 18-21, 2005 in Anaheim, California. Information is available at <www.actweb.org>.

